

My Turn! My Turn!

*Dennis Payton Knight*

There was a time when I was a little boy that it might have been possible I would be the next Joe Mastrogiovanni, if only I had been endowed with size, tenacity, competitive instinct and/or athletic ability. Mr. Mastrogiovanni was a fullback, quarterback, punter and placekicker for the Wyoming Cowboys back in the early 1950's. He played pretty good defense, too.

The mellifluous name resonates with kids who grew up in Laramie back then because of his heroics as a multi-dimensional player for the Cowboys. The name was probably scratched into the minds of a few kids in Denver, too, because he was the nemesis of Denver University in the fifties, and it was not long after that they gave up football entirely.

The name Mastrogiovanni (doesn't it just roll off the tongue?) probably doesn't mean anything to you. It has nothing to do with the point of this essay either, which happens to be Childhood Turning Point, so now I finally turn and get to the point.

My turning point away from a potential career on the gridiron was when my big brother Jerry, finding I could throw no ball, could catch no ball, and would run the wrong way with whatever ball he handed me, decided to focus his tutelage on my younger brothers. Interestingly, Monsignor McDevitt conned the busy college student-athlete Mastrogiovanni (there he is again) into coaching the St. Laurence School basketball team. Although Coach did let me be the waterboy, it wasn't much of a turning point.

I was a budding mid-century Caruso, if the bloom hadn't been nipped at age thirteen when my voice changed. I once reached High C in the choir, and then in the space of ten days all my notes went sour. My new vocal range could achieve *Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So* and *La*, and with effort I could make it to *Ti*, but I never again got to *Do*.

I could have been a cartoonist like Al Capp. I spent a summer vacation turning a Big Chief tablet into an artist's easel, copying faces of characters from the funnies of the *Laramie Boomerang*. I was particularly good at Barney Google and Major Hoople, and Dad was so impressed he said I might one day find a livelihood in the comic pages.

Eventually, along with my voice changing and the loss of my singing aspirations, my artistic interests drifted from Barney Google to a much better formed Daisy Mae, and I was capturing more than her face, too. Time showed I could draw nothing original, however, and my talent for mimicry was suited for counterfeiting, not canvas. I don't know the specific turning point away from that pursuit, but luckily it happened.

Now sixty years later, I'm at another turning point, which is to return to my childhood and find ways to drop that wonderful name into every possible conversation. I will say it over and over. Mastrogiovanni! Mastrogiovanni! Isn't it beautiful?